

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR/PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS - PRESS CONFERENCE -
DUBLIN - 3 DECEMBER 1993

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FROM JAMES LEE FOR COI RADIO TECHNICAL SERVICES

TRANSCRIPT OF JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE

GIVEN BY THE PRIME MINISTER, JOHN MAJOR

AND THE IRISH PRIME MINISTER, ALBERT REYNOLDS

IN DUBLIN

ON FRIDAY, 3 DECEMBER 1993

PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

Today, we had a very long and productive meeting. There was some very open and frank talking, many issues discussed and indeed we started off by clearing the air between the Prime Minister and myself and between our colleagues, on our side the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Dick Spring, and Maire Geoghegan Quinn, the Minister for Justice and on the Prime Minister's side Douglas Hurd, the Foreign Secretary and Sir Patrick Mayhew, the Northern Ireland Secretary.

We had long and frank discussions, we cleared the air and then we got down to the real business of the day which in the first instance was of course Northern Ireland and its problems. While the Prime Minister and myself were at that, the other ministers took the opportunity of dealing with other issues that were on the agenda and we came back to them later on this evening. Between the whole lot of us, we discussed the European Council upcoming next week and of course the GATT talks.

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In relation to Northern Ireland, we got through quite a lot of very serious work today and very productive work. We still have commissioned more work to be done. We never expected that the road was going to be easy, we always believed there would be road-blocks along the way and difficulties along the way, we anticipate some of them, some of them we don't but nevertheless we are committed to the objective of trying to produce an agreed statement that hopefully would be a formula for peace commanding support across both communities which at the end of the day have to live together. We have commissioned more work on the areas still to be resolved. We made quite a considerable amount of progress today and we will review our position next week in Brussels. In the meantime, officials from both governments will continue the work that is there.

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Mr Thomas

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR: As the Taoiseach made clear, we have had some very frank discussions today and we have also made some very useful progress on the back of them. We have had during the day six ministers spending seven hours together discussing a range of important problems.

When the Taoiseach and I met in London early last year, we set ourselves on that occasion twin objectives: firstly, to bring about a permanent cessation of violence and also to establish the basis for a lasting political settlement. We have been and are continuing to work hard to achieve those objectives.

When we met in Brussels a week or so ago, we both agreed that any initiative in this area should only be undertaken by the two governments and there can be no question of us adopting the results of other non-governmental exercises. This is a responsibility for governments and we are both clear about that.

Both governments remain committed to the talks process. Today, we have shared a range of ideas about the prospects of achieving a permanent end to the violence. We have both been working today on a joint statement, a statement consistent with our principles and wider responsibilities to both communities, a statement that will address our understanding of constitutional realities and political policies.

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There is no question of bargaining for an end to the violence. Both of us made that entirely clear at Brussels and we re-endorse that today. The Provisional IRA present themselves as interested in securing peace yet they have signally failed to deliver an end to the violence and I believe they should do so at once.

We have agreed today that there is scope for further discussions to continue our work on the joint statement; that will be taken forward in the first instance very speedily by officials who I would expect to meet early next week. I am then looking forward to meeting the Taoiseach again in Brussels at the European Council at the end of next week; at that time, we will take stock of progress and decide how to take it forward.

It has been a useful day today. There was a lot to be done, some has been done, there is more yet that remains to be done.

Northern Ireland. I have indeed repeatedly made our position abundantly clear and that is that there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority of people living there. That is ---oOo--- quite clear, unequivocal and nobody need question it any further.

In relation to any other issues that arose, of course we had many issues, of course we had some very difficult questions to put to each other and of course there are more difficult questions still to be answered but at the end of the day peace is paramount.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

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QUESTION:

Taoiseach, you have said that you seek British acknowledgement of the right of Irish people living on this island to self-determination based on consent north and south. How do you manage to persuade the Prime Minister of the legitimacy of that position?

PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

We are not going to go into the details of our discussions here. Indeed, the end objective is to find a formula that hopefully can bring a permanent cessation of violence.

In relation to the question of any change in the status of Northern Ireland, I have indeed repeatedly made our position abundantly clear and that is that there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority of people living there. That is our position, quite clear, unequivocal and nobody need question it any further.

In relation to any other issues that arose, of course we had many issues, of course we had some very difficult questions to put to each other and of course there are more difficult questions still to be answered but at the end of the day peace is paramount.

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MICHAEL BRUNSON (ITN):

You have made clear that the joint statement will obviously have to consider the issue of consent in the north. Are you both agreed that it would also have to address the matter of constitutional change in the south?

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

As the Taoiseach said a moment or so ago, we have been discussing today all the matters that need to be discussed. Many of them have advanced in our discussions today, some haven't. Neither of us are going to go into the details of either the points that are agreed or the points that are outstanding. Our objective is to continue with those discussions firstly at official level, for us then to take further stock in Brussels and then thereafter there may well be further meetings. We are committed to finding an agreement to the matters that are outstanding between us. Neither of us believe that airing any of those matters publicly in advance of that agreement is going to make that agreement any easier to reach so I am afraid I have nothing further to add than that.

PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

Can I just add in relation to the Irish Government's position that I have made that clear on quite a number of occasions and it is that if at the end of the talks process, which is a separate process to the peace initiative that we are engaged in, a balanced

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agreement is the outcome the Irish Government - and I repeat it on their behalf - will be prepared to put to the Irish people the agreement for their approval and whatever that may entail.

QUESTION:

Following the Taoiseach's statement about Unionist consent, I would like to ask the Prime Minister if he is prepared to acknowledge and give parity to the legitimacy of the aspirations of Nationalists in Northern Ireland?

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

We are discussing all these matters. We are discussing the natural aspirations of both communities whether the natural aspirations of the Republicans, the natural aspirations of the Unionists. All these are matters that we are discussing but I don't think we are going to say very much about them until we have reached conclusions.

QUESTION:

Prime Minister, are you intending to join the persuaders and what do you mean by that?

Taoiseach, when you talk about a formula in the permanent cessation, what do you mean and what does Mr. Major mean or does he understand that phrase from you?

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PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

I think "permanent cessation of violence" has only one clear meaning, that it is clear that the men of violence have indicated that they are not going to continue with the way of violence. There is no possibility of misunderstanding what is meant by either of us over the question of cessation of violence, none whatever.

As far as joining the persuaders is concerned, we have made it clear from the outset that we don't see that as the role of the British Government.

QUESTION:

Gentlemen, can I just clarify this statement? Do we take it that there will be a statement? Can you give us some idea of when we might expect to see that statement and can you be specific as to what exactly you hope this statement will achieve, a ceasefire by one particular group, by all groups? I am particularly interested to know if you have committed yourselves today to issuing a statement.

PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:) (In unison said "We have committed
PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:) ourselves to..")

(prolonged laughter)

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PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

There you are! You can see now the extent to which we are working together!

PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

We have committed ourselves today, after a long and arduous day, and a good day with a lot of progress made. We have indeed achieved progress today. We have commissioned more serious work. We have always said there are difficulties ahead. We have never made any excuses for that, we say they are there. We have commissioned more work. We will review the progress of that work in Brussels and we will take it from there. It is one step at a time.

At the end of the day it is our objective and we are both committed to trying to produce an agreed statement at the end of the period that hopefully will command the respect and the support of both communities and hopefully lead to a cessation of violence that can then open up the way for the talks process to have a far better chance of success in a changed environment.

We want to stop the killing. Both of us want to stop the killing. That is what we committed ourselves to two weeks after I became Taoiseach because if we were to do anything for the divided communities in the north it was to try and end that conflict up

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there and give the people a better way of life for the future and a better quality of life. We are as committed to that today as we were the first day we met.

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

I think the last point is worth reiterating again. This isn't something that we have started on as the result of any event over recent months. This is something that we committed ourselves to seeking - not necessarily the mechanism of seeking it - on the first occasion we met in Downing Street a very substantial time ago. Nothing has changed in the interim. We have been looking consistently to see what can be done.

As far as the joint statement is concerned, we are working on a joint statement. Self-evidently, we haven't got there yet. A good deal of it I think is now common ground between us. There are still differences between us. We are working to try and resolve those differences. We cannot be certain we will resolve those difficulties but I can promise you we will do all we can to see whether they can be resolved and if they can, we will be able to issue a statement.

QUESTION:

Taoiseach, did Prime Minister Major satisfactorily answer your concerns and the Irish Government's concerns about the recent allegations of critical Anglo-Irish documents being handed over by the British Government to Sinn Fein?

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PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

There was some straight talking today, some very frank talking today and after a period of time we put those issues aside and got on with the real business of the day because as I said, peace is paramount. That is what has to be the objective.

We are not denying that there was a strong exchange of views on both sides in relation to them but beyond that, as I say, we put them aside and got on with the real business of today and that is to continue our search for a peace formula.

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

Both of us came into the room today with frustrations over events over recent days over the last week to a fortnight. Both of us came into the room with frustrations about that but we are determined to work together if we can to achieve a satisfactory solution and a satisfactory outcome.

The first thing to do was to lay to rest those concerns that have arisen over the last fortnight or so. We did so satisfactorily this morning in private. What we are now concerned with is moving forward.

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QUESTION:

Prime Minister, the Taoiseach has talked about the possibility of peace before Christmas. Do you believe that at the end of this series of meetings which you have embarked upon that you might be able to subscribe to a joint statement which will do what he wants?

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

Everyone would like peace. We would have liked peace some time ago, there is absolutely no doubt about that. At the end of the day, whether there is peace - whatever joint statement we produce - depends upon whether those people who disrupt peace are prepared to stop. Ultimately it is for the IRA to decide that they are going to stop and for other Loyalist paramilitaries to make sure that they are going to stop. Ultimately the decision is theirs.

There is always a danger that people actually lose track as we talk of who is actually doing the killing. It is they who should stop and I hope they will stop immediately, there is no reason for them not to.

PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

We have continued to work for peace at the earliest possible date. Everybody recognises that there have been difficulties put in our way, that there have been developments in recent times that were not helpful towards the peace process. We have to overcome those difficulties and there is no doubt that there will be more

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difficulties that we can't anticipate put in our way but it is up to the two prime ministers and the two governments to transcend those difficulties and indeed not be deflected off the path that we have chosen and that is the path to peace.

QUESTION:

Arising out of those differences and the fact that you have both said you had straight talking, could I ask the Prime Minister if the contact between the British Government and the Provisional IRA and Provisional Sinn Fein will continue during the period of the talks between yourself and the Taoiseach and could I ask the Taoiseach if he made any such request today?

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

I don't think that people perhaps have fully taken on board the nature of the contacts. The British Government was approached by the IRA with the statement that we issued and we subsequently published the exchanges between us. What has happened is that we have indicated to them privately that our public position is our real position. That is the position. It hasn't been a question of negotiation with the IRA - it has been a question of responding to their questions and confirming to them that our public position is our private position. I don't know whether they are going to ask me any more questions, that is a question for them.

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PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

I am satisfied from what I have heard from the Prime Minister today that it will not interfere with the continuation of our talks process.

Northern Ireland with us; that has never been a point in dispute between the Taoiseach and I.

ELINOR GOODMAN (CH4 TV):

You referred, Prime Minister, to having reached agreement on certain points. Can you amplify which areas you did reach agreement on and did it extend to the formula for self-determination? Are you essentially going to build on existing statements like the Spring Principles?

Our challenge is to bring different identities and different cultures so that people can work out a way of living together and get rid of the violence out there.

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

That is an extremely ingenious way, Elinor, of finding out the areas where we haven't agreed and I will, if I may, simply admire the way in which you put the question without responding to it (laughter)

Yes, could I ask you to address yourself to the northern Unionists who may be concerned about the track that you are taking at the moment and could you say whether or not you would be prepared to do that?

QUESTION:

Prime Minister, do you think that any agreement between the two governments must be acceptable to the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland or do you think this is an agreement like the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 that could be settled without the consent of the majority in Northern Ireland?

That is the status of the discussions that we are having, government-to-government, but we are both aware of the need to retain the consent of the people of Northern Ireland and the

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PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

We are never going to get a permanent settlement of the troubles in Northern Ireland unless we are able to carry the consent of the people of Northern Ireland with us; that has never been a point in dispute between the Taoiseach and I.

PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

We have two different communities with two different identities, two different cultures, two different traditions. Our challenge and the challenge to both of us and both governments is to find accommodation for those different traditions, different identities and different cultures so that people can work out a way of working together, living together and get rid of the violence out of that society.

QUESTION:

Prime Minister, could I ask you to address yourself to the northern Unionists who may be concerned about the track that you are on at the moment and could you say whether or not you would agree anything with Mr. Reynolds without the prior agreement of Mr. Molineaux?

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

I am here talking government-to-government to the Taoiseach. That is the status of the discussions that we are having, government-to-government, but we are both aware of the need to retain the consent of the people of Northern Ireland and the

communities in Northern Ireland, both of them. We are aware of that in every moment of our discussions.

PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

Our commitment and our approach to this whole initiative and indeed the proposals are grounded on agreement and consent and we want to continue to address that message to the Unionist community in the north of Ireland, that there will be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of the majority and that the present peace initiative is grounded on those principles which indeed should be a consolation to those that have genuine fears and genuine uncertainty as to what we are trying to do. There is no hidden agenda between us behind our back. We seek peace and we will have the talks afterwards.

QUESTION:

In your continuing contacts with the IRA, Prime Minister, will you be keeping the Dublin Government informed given that they were furious that they weren't kept in the picture previously?

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

What continuing contacts with the IRA?

SAME QUESTIONER:

You suggested that the lines of communication are open and therefore contact may continue.

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PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

The lines are there if the IRA wish to send us messages as they have done in the past. I don't know whether they will avail themselves of that. I have no idea whether they will avail themselves of that. As the Taoiseach has said, I don't think that is going to affect the discussions between the two governments.

QUESTION:

Taoiseach, you have said that time is not on your side in relation to this peace process that you are now engaged in. When for you is the final deadline? Is it before Christmas or what? When is the final deadline that this unique opportunity runs out?

PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

We are not into deadlines. We have continued to express the urgency of the matter. One more death is one too many - that is the urgency of it - and as soon as we can get an agreement between us we won't delay. We will work day and night as our officials will work day and night. What we want to do is not to dwell on the last atrocity but try and prevent the next one.

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

We want to get an agreement if we can as speedily as we can. If we can't, then we will continue and go on and on and on. This isn't something that is suddenly going to be cut off. Until such

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time as there is a solution to the difficulties, it is incumbent upon the two governments to continue to look and see if they can find such a solution so there is no question of a deadline.

QUESTION:

Prime Minister, could I ask you a question on a different subject? Can you make any comment about the Princess of Wales reducing her official engagements and whether this in any way alters the constitutional position outlined in the House of Commons by yourself?

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

I understand, of course, and sympathise with the reasons given by the Princess of Wales for her decision today. I hope she will, as she has asked, be given the opportunity to combine a suitable public role with a more private life. I think that would be the wish of most people.

QUESTION:

Prime Minister and Taoiseach, you have said there is a possibility that you may not reach agreement this time round. What do you think the consequences of failure to agree this time round might be? Do you think there would be serious immediate repercussions?

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

One consequence is that we keep on trying.

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PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

The other one is that we are better to have tried and failed than not to have tried at all.

QUESTION:

Taoiseach, can I ask you what single thing Mr. Major can do which would most help the process of bringing about a peace agreement and can I ask the Prime Minister what single thing the Taoiseach can now do which would most pave the way to that agreement?

PRIME MINISTER REYNOLDS:

I think after this long meeting today, both of us are well aware of what each of us believe are the crunch issues in this particular process and we will continue to try and find agreement on them.

PRIME MINISTER MAJOR:

Taoiseach, I have nothing to add to that.

(END OF TRANSCRIPT)